

## BOOK REVIEW

Juan Riera: *La introducción en España del método antiséptico de Lister*. Acta Historico-Medica Vallisoletana, I. Valladolid, Ediciones del Seminario de Historia de Medicina, 1973. 81 pages. Illustrated.

Professor Juan Riera is remembered for his book on the life and work of Luis Mercado, which was published in 1968. His new work is a study of the introduction of the Listerian method into Spain. This essay is the first in a series which is to be issued by the medical historians of the University of Valladolid. Professor Riera acknowledges assistance received from learned gentlemen at the Wellcome Library in London.

The six-page introduction, which gives the background of the Listerian contribution, and the 15-page first chapter, which describes 19th century Spanish surgery, are likely to be the most interesting to non-Iberian readers. In his discussion of early formative influences Professor Riera recalls that it was Thomas Anderson, the chemist, who first drew Lister's attention to the work of Pasteur. It was of course Lister's great merit that he perceived the applicability of Pasteurian doctrines to surgery. Lister's previous studies had included investigations of inflammation and coagulation. Riera points out that prior to Lister several surgeons had used antiseptics, carbolic acid specifically, but this appears to have been done without clear rationale and certainly without the Pasteurian concepts of fermentation and bacterial infection that formed the basis of Lister's procedure. Also noteworthy was Bergmann's attempt to apply heat for purposes of antiseptis.

Curiously but not altogether surprisingly, the Listerian innovations encountered immediate opposition in England and, in the opinion of Riera, fared better on the Continent. Early acceptance was accorded by such eminent men as Volkmann, Hagedorn, Bardeleben, and Billroth. Devotees of Spanish prose will enjoy the paragraph at the end of page 15 which describes the hostility of James Y. Simpson, Spencer Wells, Lawson Tait, and John Hughes Bennett: *Fue especialmente Jacobo Young Simpson quien se enzarzó con Lister en una enconada polémica que desembocó en una verdadera batalla verbal, llegando a ataques personales. . . .*

Professor Riera, in describing Spanish surgery of the 19th century, wisely attempts to relate it to fluctuations in the cultural and especially the political condition of the country. He refers to the period from 1808 to 1834 as one of *bundimiento* (sinking) and he finds evidence of a rise between the death of Ferdinand VII in 1833 and the revolution of 1868, although non-Hispanic observers do not feel that the flame of freedom burned very brightly in that troubled era. Notable features were the translation of foreign medical and surgical writings, the specific influence of J. F. Malgaigne, and later the spread of the ideas of Pasteur and Koch. The reader will find on page 18 a list of favorable factors quoted from an essay by J. M. López Piñero.

Riera recognizes that progress often depends on the death of one generation and its replacement by more progressive (or at least newer) successors. He points to the birth, soon after 1850, of a generation destined to establish bacteriology in Spain. He cites also the creation of new surgical institutes, notably that founded by Federico Rubio y Galí (1827-1904). He writes that Listerian principles and methods apparently reached Spain somewhat slowly. Obstacles to acceptance were caused, repeatedly but not exclusively, by technical difficulties.

An extremely interesting series of paragraphs is devoted to prestigious Spanish surgeons who took no notice of Lister; these men might be called the pre-Listerians of the Listerian period. They continued to write in the old way, at least until 1891, and one Francisco Cartejarena y Aldebó, professor at Madrid, lived unrepentant until 1919.

The remainder of Professor Riera's essay completes the story by describing developments in Barcelona, Valencia, and other cities. The terminal list of references contains 325 entries and is followed by an index of names.

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